Chicken, Coffee, and Market Morality

Last week I took my children to Chick-fil-A for lunch. It was the day after the [Chick-fil-A appreciation day](http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-chick-fil-a-sales-a-world-record-20120802,0,6863629.story), but it was still packed. I chose to go to lunch there for three primary reasons. The first was that I had two good coupons which made lunch inexpensive. The second was that they have a playground and I was going to need to kill time waiting on my wife. The third was that they make a decent chicken sandwich. The following evening my wife returned from Starbucks with a chocolate chip Frappuccino for me. I drank it for two primary reasons. The first is that I needed energy to make it to my kid’s bedtime. The second is that, as I mentioned, it contained chocolate chips. Enough said.

Free enterprise allows producers to produce the products they see fit in the manner they themselves determine. It also allows consumers to voluntarily buy or not buy any producer’s products. Many producers may seek to maximize profit, but there is no requirement within a system of free enterprise that they must do so. For instance, Chick-fil-A restaurants are not opened on Sundays. Eight times out of ten that I get a craving for Chick-fil –A it happens to be a Sunday. (I had fried chicken most Sunday’s as a child and am hardwired to crave fried chicken on that specific day). Surely the chain would make more profit if they opened their doors on Sundays, but their founder, S. Truett Cathy had bigger chickens to fry than profit. While the chicken business made Mr. Cathy a self-made billionaire, as a devout Southern Baptist Mr. Cathy wished to allow a Sabbath to all of his workers. Fortunately for my taste buds, Colonel Sanders had no such disposition.

Some producers make and market their products as stand-alone purchases. Others make and market their products with a side of social conscience. For example, some producers sell free range chicken because they think that it is more humane to the chicken. Others donate a fraction of their corporate earnings to various charities or causes. Some producers take great pains to point out their means of production or social causes in order to appeal to consumers with certain tastes or beliefs. Such a practice, however, risks alienating consumers who do not share those same tastes or beliefs. While the Chick-fil-A appreciation day may have set a revenue record for the company, their [website](http://www.chick-fil-a.com/FAQ#?category=1) takes pains to distance themselves from the gay marriage issue.

Q: What is Chick-fil-A’s response to the stories circulating in the media and on the Internet?

A:  Chick-fil-A is a family-owned and family-led company serving the communities in which it operates. From the day Truett Cathy started the company, he began applying biblically-based principles to managing his business. For example, we believe that closing on Sundays, operating debt-free and devoting a percentage of our profits back to our communities are what make us a stronger company and Chick-fil-A family.

The Chick-fil-A culture and service tradition in our Restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity and respect –regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 Restaurants run by independent Owner/Operators. Going forward, our intent is to leave the policy debate over same-sex marriage to the government and political arena.

Our mission is simple: to serve great food, provide genuine hospitality and have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A.

Starbucks is just one of many companies to give benefits to the same sex partners of employees. They also came out in [favor of same sex marriage legislation in Washington](http://bottomline.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/08/08/13165788-chicken-or-coffee-gay-marriage-or-no-when-companies-take-sides?lite). This too runs the risk of alienating caffeine-loving Evangelicals, Catholics, or Muslims, but may appeal to other potential coffee consumers. Personally, I like to frequent both Chick-fil-A and Starbucks based upon the products they sell. The fewer political stances they take the better.

The joy of free enterprise is that it allows people with different views to express them. Free enterprise is like freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of religion all rolled up into economic transactions. Freedom of religion does not guarantee that everyone will agree with your religion of choice. Freedom of speech does not mean that you will like everything you hear. Freedom of association may even mean that people might not let you join their club. Free enterprise doesn’t guarantee you that producers will cater to your narrow tastes or beliefs. On the other hand, it gives you the freedom to be your own producer so you can fulfill your wants and satisfy your beliefs accordingly. If you want to fry chicken on Sundays, knock yourself out, just don’t get the grease near my wife’s new stove….

The [mayors of Chicago and Boston](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/with-chick-fil-a-fight-progressive-mayors-get-their-ground-zero-mosque-moment/2012/07/31/gJQAEqTiLX_blog.html) came out against freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of religion, and free enterprise as they claimed they would try to keep Chick-fil-A’s from entering their cities. While few believe their boasts to be true, it has to make you wonder just how quickly politicians will flush our freedoms down the drain if you let them.

Adam Smith [wrote in *The Wealth of Nations,*](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/adamsmith136391.html) “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” It is this self-interest which prevents many companies from mixing religion and politics with corporate profits. Free enterprise gives people what they want at prices they are willing to pay. Those who seek to diminish the rule of free enterprise are most often looking to substitute their tastes or beliefs for yours. Any country seeking to promote the freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of religion can only be consistent if they also adhere to a system of free enterprise. Only then can you have your chicken and drink your caffeine too – or not.